



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-PRTs Help to Bolster Local Self Government in Iraq-

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Taji - "Security and effective local government go hand in hand" and are essential for reconstruction and stabilization, says Embedded Provincial Reconstruction (EPRT) Team Leader Thomas Burke.

Burke, a career Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State, made his comments to Embassy Public Affairs Counselor Philip T. Reeker during Reeker's March 14 visit to the team's headquarters in Taji located outside Baghdad.

Burke's team is one of 13 joint U.S. military and civilian EPRTs deployed throughout Iraq since April 2007 to assist and empower local governments to become less dependent on outside assistance to provide for the basic needs of their populations.

"Our job," Burke observed, "is to help the Iraqis link security and effective local government, not only by promoting transparency and the rule of law, but also by helping them to build a sustained capacity to govern."

During his visit, Counselor Reeker was briefed by several of Burke's civilian and military team members on his EPRT's efforts to support governance and economic development in Taji, Tarmiya, Abu Ghraib, districts surrounding Baghdad where 1.5 million residents live.

Colonel Michael Bridges, EPRT deputy team leader and governance advisor, described his team's cooperation with Qadas and Nahias (local district and neighborhood councils) in establishing "consolidated government centers" in Taji and Abu Ghaib as a first step in governance capacity building.

"One year ago," recalled Bridges, "We were looking at a hodgepodge of local government operations scattered around Taji and Abu Ghraib and noticed that many existing government facilities were destroyed from combat operations or by Al Qaeda and other terror or criminal groups and thus, did not lend themselves to governance capacity building or security."

The team's solution was to re-locate all local government activities to single sites so the public could do "one stop shopping." In Taji, the team helped remodel and add additions to the Qada center. In Abu Ghraib, the EPRT coordinated construction of a trailer park to house the district government's offices.



EPRT 3 Team Member Colonel Mike Bridges conducts a practicum on committee procedures with members of local governing councils, Qadas and Nahias, from Tarimiyah.

Efforts now focus on Tarmiyah, where, just two days before Counselor Reeker's visit, the EPRT helped celebrate the opening of the new temporary courthouse, which was renovated by the Iraqi Ministry of Justice. Judge Rabeeh Mohamed Mahmoud, two new Investigators, Legal Clerk and Security Team will operate in the Tarmiyah Qada. "The Rule of Law has returned to Tarmiyah Qada after a long absence," the Colonel declared.

Recalling that Coalition Forces had been spending "huge amounts of money" to protect dozens of dilapidated government buildings, Team Leader Burke told Reeker the consolidated locations also simplified, and therefore rendered more efficient, the protective measures by the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police forces. "One year later, you can feel the difference," observed Burke, "We not only feel safer going to the Qada [government center] but more importantly, the Iraqis do."

Reeker also met with another EPRT whose area of responsibility includes Sadr City, Adhamiyah, and Istiqla'al, which account for almost 40 percent of Baghdad's population.

Team Leader Paul Folmsbee introduced Reeker to Colonel Jeffrey Bonner, whom Folmsbee praised for inspiring local governments to take on more security responsibilities through the formation of local fuel protection committees in Adhamiya.

These local committees play a unique role, Bonner said, in coordinating efforts by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Ministry of Oil to escort and protect much needed propane deliveries.

"Because local government coordinates distribution," Bonner said, "propane is sold at the government rate of 7,000 dinar for a 12.5kg cylinder -- a price exceedingly cheaper than the average national black market rate of between 13,000 to 20,000 dinars typically paid by local residents before the fuel committees were formed."

Bonner added that the fuel committees' success underscores to Iraqi citizens the importance of power-sharing between the Iraqi national government and its local counterparts.

Thanking his EPRT hosts, Counselor Reeker lauded PRT governance capacity building throughout Iraq for "helping raise, not only ordinary Iraqi citizens' security and thus their standard of living, but also their awareness of how effective local government strengthens their society as a whole."